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ABSTRACT

The spoken language of Israeli children from various socioeconomic and ethnic groups was compared in terms of pragmatic strategies of communication in order to evaluate whether disadvantaged children were linguistically deficient. Interviews were conducted with a sample of 11- and 12-year-old children from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Examination of the interview transcripts demonstrates that disadvantaged children use the same types of pragmatic communication strategies as privileged children. The actual linguistic performance may appear less intelligent to middle-class listeners due to different patterns of linguistic behavior deriving from their different backgrounds. It was observed that the privileged children used a more formal register and provided more detailed information in response to questions. However, the two registers used by the two groups of children do not differ significantly with regard to sentence complexity and vocabulary size. It is concluded that unfavorable evaluations of the speech of disadvantaged children arise in part from differences in background rather than from genuine deficiencies in linguistic competence. (Author/RW)

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THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN ISRAEL – A LOOK AT SOME PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of whether so-called "disadvantaged" children are indeed, as has often been suggested, deficient both linguistically and in mental capacities. Two interviews with Israeli children from disadvantaged and privileged populations are carefully examined. It is shown that disadvantaged children practice the same types of pragmatic strategies of communication as privileged children, although their actual linguistic performance may come through to middle-class observers as less intelligent. The differing patterns of linguistic behavior of the children are shown to derive from their different backgrounds and systems of values, which can lead to different probablistic estimates on their part of speaker intentions and judgements as to what counts as a cooperative reply to a given utterance. It is suggested, therefore, that unfavorable evaluations of the speech of disadvantaged children stem in part from the discrepancies existing between the backgrounds of such children and those of their interlocutors, rather than from genuine deficiencies in linguistic competence and/or in the employment of pragmatic strategies of language usage.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As in other parts of the world, in recent years the Ministry of Education in Israel and numerous educational projects have shown a rising interest in the problems of "disadvantaged" or "deprived" children. The choice of the Hebrew term TEUNEI TIPUACH "in need of

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care" reflects a policy on the part of its advocates to rectify the situation by initiating programs intended to enrich the children's educational experiences in areas which are deemed crucial for their adequate performance in school, specifically, and in society, generally. Such a view necessitates, of course, the identification of not only the deprived child himself, but also of the factors that are responsible for the less than adequate levels of his performance and achievements, so that proper preventive and/or remedial measures can be taken.

Though currently in Israel we find no consensus of opinion about criteria relevant for identifying deprived children or disadvantaged populations in general, the statements of operational criteria for determining such children for eligibility for grants and various enrichment programs generally consist of different combinations of factors, including scholastic achievement of the children and the educational training of their teachers as well as certain socio-economic considerations such as the national origin of the parents (whether they immigrated to Israel from Asia or Northern Africa, as opposed to Western Europe and America), how long they have lived in Israel, their income, their educational level, the number of children in the family, and the space available at home. Determinations about entire schools are made on the basis of the percentage of deprived children in the given educational institution (See, e.g., Sheintuch and Lewin, 1981; Algarebali, 1975; Rokach, 1970.).

There is understandably even less agreement on the more complex issues involving the examination and identification of possible factors responsible for such deprivation and of areas of child behavior and performance in need of remedial care.[2] This paper is concerned only with one of the many areas that have been explored in this connection – that of the language skills of the so-called "disadvantaged" children.

A considerable body of literature is available today on the subject of the linguistic behavior of disadvantaged children, both in Israel and elsewhere. Specifically, it has been reported in Israel (e.g., Minkowitz, 1969) that the disadvantaged child fails in almost all sub-

jects in school, especially in the subject Hebrew language, as a consequence, tends to fail more in subjects that are based primarily on language skills than in those such as arithmetic and arts and crafts wherein language plays a secondary role. This finding confirms the existence of certain differences in the verbal behaviors of disadvantaged and privileged Israeli children, and can, in theory, lend support to either of two basic positions prevalent in the literature about the relationship between verbal behavior and success in school and society: one basic position is that disadvantaged children for some reason suffer from some kind of language deficit (e.g., Deutsch, 1963; Bernstein, 1966; Bereiter and Englemann, 1966) while the other, supported by Labov-type studies (1970) of spoken every-day language, does not accept the view that the so-called "disadvantaged" children are linguistically deprived, and attributes bad academic records to middle-class bias of educationalists who consider middle-class standard language to be the desirable linguistic norm and thus assess the nonstandard verbal performance of the low-class children to be less than adequate.[3]

What chiefly concerns the present study is not the hypotheses that underlie the descriptions and explanations made about the language of the privileged and the disadvantaged children, but rather the nature of the differences, if any, observed between the two modes of linguistic behavior.

Labov (1970) has demonstrated that Negro children from urban ghettos of the U.S. do in fact express themselves well verbally, given a favorable social context, and that their speech, although, perhaps, not as verbose as that of middle-class children, is equally governed by grammatical regularities and clearly displays an ability for logical thought and argumentation on the part of its speakers.

Similarly, in the Israeli context, Davis (1977, 1978) reports on a study he conducted on the speech of 36 6th graders from various areas of the country that he found no significant differences between the verbal behaviors of disadvantaged and privileged children in vocabulary size, the range of sentence structures that were used, and the number of abstract words as well as the number of causal adverbs that

were employed by the two populations. The differences that the study did find in the verbal behavior of children from the two populations could be characterized in terms of certain syntactic and phonological differences and the choice of vocabulary, all of which seemed to indicate that the children from the different populations in the sample were using different registers -- i.e., a formal register usually used in school and academic circles, and an informal "intimate" register generally used among family members and friends in the streets, in the army, etc.[4] Davis claims that while the child from the privileged circles is familiar with a repertoire of registers, including the formal register which he has learned to use from his parents and other adults around him even before beginning to attend school, the disadvantaged child is confronted with the formal register for the first time when he attends school. While the disadvantaged child learns to understand the formal register used at school, he is generally not sufficiently comfortable with it to use it actively. In other words, Davis seems to suggest that because of his late exposure to the formal register in an artificial school setting, the disadvantaged child experiences psychological barriers which prevent him/her from skillfully switching registers, like the privileged child, in an essentially diglossic Israeli society dominated by middle-class norms of behavior. This inflexibility of the disadvantaged child to switch to a formal register when the situation calls for it also helps explain why he does badly in written Hebrew (Staal, 1960) and in subjects wherein written expression plays an important role. The written Hebrew demanded at school is generally of a formal variety, with which the disadvantaged student does not feel "at ease". Nir (1978), too, shares similar views about the linguistic behavior of disadvantaged Israeli children.

What specifically motivates the present study is the commonly voiced opinion in Israel, among educators and laymen alike, that the "mental capacities" of the disadvantaged child as reflected by his language are inferior to those of the privileged child (- the disadvantaged child, for example, has often been noted to misunderstand even simple questions, generally providing irrelevant and inaccurate replies to them -) and the concomitant failure of the "formal/informal registers" hypothesis alone to account for the professed differences. These

two registers are assessed to be more or less equally complex in form -- in terms of vocabulary size, semantic and syntactic categories of the lexicon used, variety of sentence structures, sentence length, and sentence complexity. Neither is there any evidence, as in the Labov studies, for claiming that the contents of the speech of the disadvantaged child display an inability on his part to think logically, and hence for attributing the professed differences to differences in logical performance - i.e., there is no evidence that the general abilities of disadvantaged Israeli children to speak are inferior to those of the privileged children. Thus, one must examine other yet unexplored aspects of language and language usage in search for features that serve as the source for the commonly encountered differential judgement of the children's "mental capacities" as reflected by their language. For it seems hardly likely for mere middle-class bias of educators for more formal registers to give rise to so strong a myth about differences in the mental capacities of the pupils.

PRAGMATICS OF LANGUAGE USAGE

One area that affects linguistic behavior is that of pragmatics of language usage. This area includes the study of how speaker attitudes, intentions, implications, and the like can be conveyed without their being explicitly uttered, given certain linguistic and situational contexts and background knowledge shared by speaker and hearer. Because this aspect of verbal behavior involves considerations of the context of the speech situation of the previous knowledge and experience of the participants in the speech exchange, it is most likely to vary from culture to culture and from one socio-economic class to another, and thus affect the general patterns of verbal behavior of different groups (or, perhaps, even individuals) in different ways.[5]

Grice (1968) outlines some general cooperative principles governing conversations or spoken language which, among other things, serve to explain how interlocutors in a conversation can implicate and infer messages without their being explicitly stated. Grice states that talk exchanges are generally, to some degree, cooperative efforts in which the participants recognize to some extent a common purpose or,

at least, a mutually accepted direction. The cooperative efforts governing human talk exchanges generally observe the following maxims:

1. Maxim of quantity: cooperate by making your contribution in the exchange as (and not more or less) informative as required.

2. Maxim of quality: cooperate by not saying things you believe to be false or for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. Maxim of relation: cooperate by saying things that are relevant.

4. Maxim of manner: cooperate by being orderly and by avoiding obscurity of expression, ambiguity, and unnecessary prolixity.

Normally speakers learn to behave in this way in childhood, and such cooperative "efforts" become natural and effortless – almost habitual, given the assumption that the speakers are interested in the goals that are central to any conversation -- i.e., giving and receiving information and influencing and being influenced by others. In certain cases, of course, a participant in a talk exchange may deliberately violate a maxim either by explicitly informing the hearer that he is opting out of the conversation or by choosing to deceive his hearer(s) either by lying, or by providing misleading, irrelevant information, for example. Or, the speaker may blatantly violate a conversational maxim without even opting out of the conversation. In such cases, if one assumes that the speaker is observing the general spirit of the cooperative principles governing talk exchanges, then he will interpret the blatant violation of a maxim by the speaker to be a deliberate act on his part to implicitly convey some information to his hearer. The speaker, for his part, acts on the premise that the hearer is equipped with the necessary knowledge about the context and about the cooperative principles of conversation that would enable him to make the probablistic estimates and reasoned argumentations required in order to conclude what is implicated by his utterance. For an example of a conversational maxim being blatantly violated (by the speaker) to convey an implicature, consider the utterance WOMEN ARE WOMEN. This is a tautology,

which at the literal level violates the maxim of quantity, since it does not impart any information. But given some particular situational and linguistic context, some common grounds of past experience and knowledge among the interlocutors, and the conversational principles, the utterance derives a certain nonliteral interpretation. This interpretation is arrived at only if the hearer assumes that the speaker is cooperating in the exchange. Faced with this assumption, the hearer must reconcile it with the fact that at the literal level the utterance seems to make no contribution to the conversation. Thus, the hearer concludes that the speaker must, therefore, be wishing to impart a generalization that he is reluctant to express openly -- namely, that women are expected to be or to behave as described or suggested in the particular context. The exact interpretation of the conversational implicature is also dependent, of course, on the past experience, knowledge, and attitudes of the hearer as well as on his assessment of the experience, knowledge, and attitudes of the speaker and on the particular context. Thus, the conversational implicature(s) of an utterance are context-sensitive and based on probabilistic estimates; they vary from context to context and for different interlocutors.[7]

Another closely related area of linguistic pragmatics involves the interpretation of indirect speech acts. While direct speech acts are utterances that contain the illocutionary force indicators of the illocutionary act the speaker intended it to perform, indirect speech acts (Searle, 1975) are utterances, which, though containing the illocutionary force indicators of one act, can be used by the speaker to perform an additional illocutionary act, given a suitable context. In these acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic and on general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer, involving the general principles of cooperative conversation discussed earlier. An instance of a direct speech act requesting a person to pass the salt across the dinner table, for example, would be PLEASE, PASS THE SALT, whereas an indirect speech with the same intention would be CAN YOU REACH THE SALT?, which on the literal level counts as a question about the abilities of the addressee. The non-literal inter-

pretation of the speech act is arrived at by way of inferential strategies; first the literal illocutionary force is rejected as irrelevant to the conversation or situation in question, and second, assuming that the speaker is cooperating and that the intended speech act is nevertheless relevant to the general context, a different interpretation is sought based on probabilistic estimates consistent with the situation. In the context of the dinner table, inquiring whether the addressee has the ability to reach the salt, where it is clearly obvious that he or she does have that ability and where the literal inquiry as well as any reply to it are incongruous with the situation in question, can only be reasonably interpreted as an inquiry into a necessary preparatory condition for any request to be fulfilled -- namely, that the person of whom it is requested have the ability to carry out the request and hence, indirectly, constitutes the request itself.

As Morgan (1977) stresses, indirect speech acts and conversational implicatures are not entailed, but merely suggested or hinted at, even though reasoning powers are involved in both the implicational and the inferential processes. In most cases the conclusion is not forced on one, but is arrived at by making educated guesses and probabilistic estimates in order to conclude that the literal sense is inappropriate and to select the most likely of all the possible interpretations that come to mind. Thus, while failure to recognize an entailment of an utterance is considered to indicate linguistic "dullness," to say the least,[8] failure to infer the intended implicature or the intended indirect speech act cannot be attributed to some kind of linguistic deficiency on the part of the hearer but to a basic incongruity in the relevant background knowledge and experience possessed by the speaker and hearer -- the hearer does not share sufficient grounds with the speaker for guessing his intentions, and moreover, the speaker is not aware of this problem.

A COMPARISON OF THE PRAGMATICS OF THE HEBREW SPOKEN BY DIFFERENT CHILDREN POPULATIONS

In this section it is suggested that the study of the pragmatic aspects of the language usage of speakers from different ethnic and

socio-economic groups could reveal interestingly different patterns of linguistic behavior, involving significant differences in the interpretations of speech acts and their pragmatic intents. Such differences stem from differences in basic conceptions as to what counts as adequately informative, truthful, accurate, relevant, and clear in order to obey the general cooperative principles (maxims) governing conversations and as to the relative importance of these various maxims with respect to each other. These differences could be in part responsible for commonly voiced but obviously unjustified suggestion that the language of certain socio-economic populations is deficient and/or that their reasoning capacities as they come through in their linguistic behavior are inferior.

The spoken language of a sample of 11–12 year-old Israeli school children from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds was examined. The subjects were drawn from the Davis study discussed earlier in the paper, and included children who are considered as disadvantaged (by the Israeli norms discussed in the introduction) as well as privileged ones. The speech of the subjects had been taped during interviews with an adult who met with the children two at a time within the school grounds. The speech of the children, according to the Davis study, had revealed that in the interview situation the privileged children tend to use a more formal register than the disadvantaged children, and furthermore, that the structural complexity of the sentences and the vocabulary size used in the two registers are not significantly different.

A further examination of the tape recordings of these interviews for the purposes of the current study reveals certain fine differences in the interpretations made by the children from the two populations of the indirect speech acts which occur in the conversations, and also in the children's assessments as to what utterances count as adequate and appropriate for fulfilling the cooperative goals of the conversation, as perceived by them. The following conversations, consisting of the "beginnings" of two interviews, one with two so-called "disadvantaged," the other with two "privileged" ones, are typical of the many interviews recorded.[9] A close examination of the two will provide some idea of the differences in the pragmatic interpretations (made

by the two populations) of the basically similar questions and requests posed to them and consequently, in the pragmatic strategies they use in their own speech.

I. Interview with two so-called "disadvantaged" children from the town, Dimonah

Interviewer: What is your name?
A: Shimon Peress.

Interviewer: What! Really?!
A: Yes.

Interviewer: And yours?
B: Shimon Beaton.

Interviewer: Oh! Are you friends?
B: Yes.

Interviewer: O.K., Shimon Peress, how old are you?
A: Twelve.

Interviewer: When was your last birthday?
A: Uh. . .I was very small.

Interviewer: O.K., where were you born?
A: In Israel.

Interviewer: Where?
A: What where?

Interviewer: Where? – in Dimonah?
A: In Dimonah. Yes, in Dimonah.

Interviewer: Where were your parents born?
A: In Morocco.

Interviewer: Both of them?
A: Yes.

Interviewer: How many brothers (and sisters) are you?
A: With the married ones?

Interviewer: All together.
A: O.K., with our parents we are twelve.

Interviewer: And how many live at home?
A: Without the married ones? Then, it's seven.

Interviewer: Which languages do you speak at home?
A: Arabic. . .Hebrew. . .

Interviewer: Yes! You know Arabic?
A: Arabic? Yes, a little.

Interviewer: O.K., Shimon, How old. . .?
B: Twelve and a half years old.

Interviewer: Yes, where were you born?
B: In Israel.

Interviewer: Where? Here?
B: In Beer-Sheva.

Interviewer: Yes. Where were your parents born?
B: In Morocco.

Interviewer: Which languages do you speak?
B: Arabic. . .Hebrew.

Interviewer: Great! How many brothers (and sisters) are you?
B: Without my parents, seven. They all live at home.

Interviewer: What do you speak more – Arabic or Hebrew?
B: Hebrew.

Interviewer: Great. What T.V. programs do you like?
B: "Family Affair", "Starsky and Hutch", and "Kunta Kinte. . .Roots". And when there are Westerns. Good movies. Also sports news, and also news broadcast, and "KOLBOTEK".

II. Interview with two so-called "privileged" children from the city, Haifa

Interviewer: What is your name?
C: Joshua.

Interviewer: How old are you?
C: Eleven and a half years old.

Interviewer: Where were you born?
C: In Haifa.

Interviewer: And your parents?
C: On my mother's side, second generation in Israel and on my father's side first generation in Israel.

Interviewer: And you grandparents on your father's side?
C: Egypt.

Interviewer: How many brothers (and sisters) are you?
C: I - I have another two brothers and a sister.

Interviewer: What is your name?
D: Ronny.

Interviewer: How old are you?
D: Eleven and a half years old.

Interviewer: Were you born here in Haifa?
D: In Jerusalem.

Interviewer: And your parents?
D: No, my father was born in Canada and my mother in Israel.

Interviewer: Which languages are spoken at home?
D: Hebrew.

Interviewer: Only?
D: Yes.

Interviewer: Not English?
D: Sometimes, when they want to speak about things that they don't want me to know, then they speak English.

Interviewer: And you understand?!
D: I understand? Of Course I understand!

Interviewer: How many brothers (and sisters) are you?
D: Two. I have another brother.

Interviewer: O.K. If you want -- Maybe you want to tell me about T.V. programs in Israel.

C: Nice ones? Which programs are nice?

Interviewer: Yes, what you like.
C: O.K. then, I think that there are nice programs on Thursdays. Programs . . . eh . . . I forgot how they call it.

Interviewer: "Roots"?
C: Yes! Very nice!

Interviewer: Do you like it?
D: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me a little about it.
D: To tell you the story?

Interviewer: Yes.
D: I like it because its production is nice, and besides, one can feel that it's not only us – that is to say, especially after the movie of "HEERBET HEEZA". Then I felt that I am not so much to blame, because in the U.S. they no longer have anything to say about us. Besides, it's a realistic movie about Blacks in Africa. An excellent movie. Now. . .also in. . .now then. . .and there's also a nice movie on Wednesdays: "Brothers". . .

One feature which characterizes the speech of the privileged children more strongly than that of the disadvantaged ones is the motivation to be precise about facts. This feature is reflected in the precision with which they provide requested information about their age and place of birth, for example. Privileged children seem to perceive such accuracy to be essential to cooperative exchange in the interview situation and believe it to help provide the interviewer with the information he is interested in; it also helps observe the cooperative maxim of manner by avoiding obscurity of expression. Note, for example, that while both boys from Haifa report their ages to the accuracy of 1/2 a year, only the second of the Dimonah boys bothers to do so. The first is so naively unaware of the interviewer's possible demands for such precision that he interprets her ensuing question: WHEN WAS YOUR LAST BIRTHDAY? as an inquiry into when his birthday was last celebrated, to which he answers: UH . . . I WAS VERY SMALL. The question about place of birth is similarly interpreted by the Haifa boys to call for the city of birth, as is explicitly shown by the first boy's answer: IN HAIFA, but by the Dimonah boys, for the country only, as witnessed in their prompt and identical answers: IN ISRAEL. Even when the interviewer goes on to probe further after this reply, by asking

again: WHERE?, the first boy is confused and asks: WHAT WHERE? Not until the interviewer's suggestion: WHERE? —— IN DIMONAH? does it occur to him that the request is for a more precise specification of the place of birth, whereupon he impatiently answers: IN DIMON—AH. YES, IN DIMONAH.

Another type of differences observed in the reply patterns exhibited by the children of the two populations involves the cooperative maxim of relation, which states that an utterance counts as a cooperative contribution to the conversation only to the extent that it is relevant to it. Segments of the utterances that may seem to the uninvolved bystander to be strictly-speaking "extra", often irrelevant, bits of information outwardly violating the maxims of quantity, and, perhaps of relation, are deemed by certain children to be important for certain socio-cultural-economic reasons. For example, although no explicit inquiry is made into the sex of the boys' siblings, the Haifa boys -- but not those from Dimonah--find it necessary to provide this information when asked explicitly about the number of siblings. In Hebrew the question is literally worded as: HOW MANY BROTHERS ARE YOU?, where BROTHERS in Hebrew is ambiguous between the narrow reading 'male sibling' and the broad one, meaning 'sibling of any sex'. It is also clear that all the children interviewed interpreted the word in its broad sense. Interestingly, the final answers of the Dimonah boys were: O.K., WITH OUR PARENTS WE ARE TWELVE, from which we can reasonably conclude that the boy has a total of 9 siblings, and WITHOUT MY PARENTS, SEVEN. THEY ALL LIVE AT HOME, from which it can be concluded that the boy has 6 siblings. No mention is made of the sex of the siblings. Quite differently, the Haifa boys perceive the sex of the sibling to be information that is relevant to the question, even though the broad sense of the term, 'sibling' does not indicate sex, and answer: I — I HAVE ANOTHER TWO BROTH—ERS AND A SISTER, and TWO. I HAVE ANOTHER BROTHER.

Additional instances of what may seem to be violations of the maxims of quantity and relation by one group of children and not by the other are also found to be attributable to their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, when Dimonah boys are asked

about the number of siblings they have, they each interpret the question as an inquiry into the number of people living at home rather than as an expression of genuine interest in the number of siblings. Coming from large families of lower income, where space at home is scarce, the number of people living there becomes a matter of serious concern. Given the situation, where the question about the number of siblings comes from a middle-class adult (-an outsider to the child's home environment-), it certainly must be intended, as far as the child is concerned, as an indirect polite inquiry into his living conditions. Hence the replies: WITH THE MARRIED ONES? (who have presumably left the home) . . . O.K., WITH OUR PARENTS, WE ARE TWELVE (since the parents also live at home), and the more explicit: WITHOUT MY PARENTS, SEVEN. THEY ALL LIVE AT HOME. No such interpretations -- or rather, misinterpretation -- of the question are made by the Haifa children, who are not sensitive to the problem of tight living space at home. For them, however, other issues assume higher relevance. Coming from more established families, who have either immigrated from the West or who have lived in the area for quite a while, these children are proud of their ancestry, and are aware of the prestige connected with being indigenous to the land, hence one of the Haifa boys' reply: ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE, SECOND GENERATION IN ISRAEL AND ON MY FATHER'S SIDE FIRST GENERATION IN ISRAEL, rather than the simple but sufficiently informatiive: IN ISRAEL, when asked where his parents were born. In these examples we see that although the two sets of children are exercising the same cooperative principles of conversation and the same pragmatic strategies of violating the maxim of quantity in order to obey the more important maxim of relation in contexts which they perceive it necessary to do so, the Haifa boys may come out sounding more "intelligent" to a middle-class observer who shares their background; for him the violations of the maxim appear to occur in justified contexts, where the Haifa boys are concerned, and much less so where it comes to the Dimonah boys.

The differences in the way the boys come through become especially marked (and, in all likelihood, in favor of the Haifa boys,) when the latter strictly speaking, violate the maxims of quantity and relation, and provide evaluations rather than accounts of the T.V. pro-

grams, when asked to tell about them. While one Dimonah boy, as it turns out, at the end of the next section of the interview (provided below) is prepared to tell the story of "Roots" in response to the request, the Haifa boy does not consider it an appropriate request. First he double-checks to find out whether he heard the literal request correctly and asks: TO TELL YOU THE STORY? When confronted by a definite: YES, he has little choice other than to reinterpret it as a request for evaluation, since knowing that the interviewer has probably viewed the program, he reasons that it is not likely for her to want to hear an account of what she has already watched. Under the circumstances, in order for the request to elicit a communicatively useful response, the boy figures it is best to reinterpret it -- in this case, as a request for evaluation.

A few more lines from what follows in the interviews display the same patterns. The cooperative efforts of the Dimonah boys are aimed more at the literal level of what is said, while those of the Haifa boys tend to be more at its nonliteral level. The former set of children not familiar with the general background of the interviewer, do not venture to make so many probabilistic guesses about her communicative intentions, whereas the latter set, being familiar with her general type of background, and moreover, being aware of their familiarity with it, are more favorably disposed to attempting to guess her implicit intentions.

III. More from the interview with the boys from Dimonah.

Interviewer: Yes, that's it. Then I want you to tell me about each of these programs. . .in sports news, what do you see?

B: In sports, first of all, we see the games. We see on T.V. what there was in the soccer game, and they show pieces from the month's goals, and the people who receive the month's award and the state cup. And also basketball and vollevball and basketball -- eh -- handball. And also athletics, track.

Interviewer: And tell me, do you have a league?
B: Yes, we do, a soccer league and a basketball league.

Interviewer: Who? . . . do you play?
B: Yes, we -- me and him and another one. We played, once him, and once me.

A: A game, and they photographed us!

Interviewer: Really?!
A: Yes -- us, both, riding on a donkey, on a camel, making sommersaults in the air!

Interviewer: And do you have contests?
A: Yes, sure.

Interviewer: Do you play for a cup -- for something?
A: Yes, we came fourth last year. When the [name of the team is unintelligible] were here, we were fourth.

B: We have sports on Thursdays.

Interviewer: Yes? Do you practice?
B: Yes, sure we practice. We go to school after we finish our homework. We come.

Interviewer: Great! Do you also have clubs?
B: Yes, we do.
A: Sure, there's a journalism club, there's a science club, there's a this - Hebrew, English. All sorts of clubs.

Interviewer: And what clubs do you attend?
A: I want to attend all the subjects: Arithmetic, Hebrew, Science -- also Science is easy.

Interviewer: Great, then you're very busy! That's it. Now tell me about the programs. Tell me about anything you watch.

A: Hey! Tell her a little bit.

B: Should I tell?

Interviewer: I want you to tell me about something.

B: Once there was a family. It was a father, and he was strong. He wanted. . .

IV. More from the interview with the boys from Haifa

D: (continuation) But it is. . .I don't know. . .my father doesn't like it so much, because it's all troubles there -- only troubles! It never ends well -- only troubles! Now, in my opinion, on Tuesdays, the T.V. is ill-advised for giving nice broadcasts. Now, sports for children, then they give this. It's too late to watch the children swim. On the whole the programs on T.V. are o.k., except for sports, which they give too late. For example, a few years ago "The Proverb for the Day" came after the news and now they put it before the news in order for everyone to watch "The Proverb for the Day." This is, indeed, quite O.K. Now, in order to watch a suspense movie, for example -- let's suppose I want to watch -- only some of them. Then I can't watch. I have to stay up late. This interferes with all of my schedule.

Interviewer: Have you never thought that perhaps you could write to them?

D: Well, this wouldn't help, because we're only one. One letter can't help anything!

Interviewer: Maybe all of you. . .?
D: Yes, we thought about it, but it was not carried out. My most favorite program is the sports news. . . .

The differential disposition of the two sets of boys to interpret what is said is transparent (in the interviews) in the interpretation of the speech acts used in the course of the conversation. The Haifa boys, sharing more closely the interviewer's background, are better able than the Dimonah boys to catch on to an indirect speech act where one is intended. For example, when the first Dimonah boy states that his name is Shimon Peress, which happens to also be the name of Israel's opposition party leader, and is confronted with the expletive remark expressing surprise: WHAT! REALLY?!, he interprets it at its literal level to be a demand or request for confirmation that he is obeying the maxim of quality, and feels the need to reply with a serious: YES. This occurs again in the course of the interview when the interviewer exclaims: REALLY?! to the boy's remark that they were photographed; he simply answers; YES, and goes on to produce relevant details of the photographed event. But when the second Haifa boy, after explaining to the interviewer that his parents spoke English so that he wouldn't understand, was asked by her in an amused ironic tone: AND YOU UNDERSTAND?!, he is aware of both levels of interpretation – the genuine question, and the ironic comment, and answers in a similarly amused tone with the exclamation: I UNDERSTAND? OF COURSE, I UNDERSTAND! Similarly, in the course of the conversation, when the interviewer asks the question: HAVE YOU NE–VER THOUGHT THAT PERHAPS YOU COULD WRITE TO THEM?, intending it as a suggestion to the Haifa boy to write to the television authorities, he immediately catches on to the indirect speech act, explaining the reason for his implied rejection: WELL, THIS WOULD–N'T HELP, BECAUSE WE'RE ONLY ONE. ONE LETTER CAN'T HELP ANYTHING!

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In general, however, where background information is not as crucial to the interpretation of the speech act, and where the boys' sincerity in providing truthful information is not in question, the

so-called "disadvantaged" boys display adequate skills at practicing pragmatic strategies of both the implicational and the inferential types, not at all inferior to those displayed by the so-called "privileged" boys. When asked simple YES–NO questions such as: AND TELL ME, DO YOU HAVE A LEAGUE? or DO YOU HAVE CLUBS?, the Dimonah boys reply by producing a list, in addition to the reply to the literal question. They interpret the speech act not only at its literal level, but at a non-literal level as well, since they figure that a reply to the literal level alone cannot be sufficiently informative in the context of the conversation. Hence, they interpret the YES–NO question to be an indirect speech act requesting a list, and oblige with their respective replies: YES, WE DO, A SOCCER LEAGUE AND A BASKETBALL LEAGUE, and SURE, THERE'S A JOURNALISM CLUB, THERE'S A SCIENCE CLUB, THERE'S THIS --- HEBREW, ENGLISH. ALL SORTS OF CLUBS.

The Dimonah boys also show equal skill at "manipulating" conversations -- shifting topics of conversation, cleverly avoiding replies that might reflect badly upon them, and passing on "boring" tasks to their fellow interviewees. In one excerpt from the interviews we have noted how one of the Haifa boys tactfully rejects the interviewer's suggestion to write a letter. When she begins to insist, however, that maybe all of them could write so that their plea would carry weight, the boy quickly interrupts with: YES WE THOUGHT A–BOUT IT, BUT IT WAS NOT CARRIED OUT, and goes on to shift the conversation back to his evaluation of T.V. programs: MY MOST FAVORITE PROGRAM IS SPORTS NEWS. . . In the excerpt from the interview with the Dimonah boys, we also find that one of the boys introduces a slight shift in the conversation topic by saying: WE HAVE SPORTS ON THURSDAYS. And later, in the course of the conversation when one of them lists the clubs that are available, and in return is faced with the embarrassing -- embarrassing, because he probably attends none of them -- question: AND WHAT CLUBS DO YOU ATTEND?, he avoids a direct: NONE or some fake list, which would be a serious violation of the cooperative principles of conversation. Instead, he opts for a reply that "saves face" and is, nevertheless, somewhat relevant to the original request for information: I

WANT TO ATTEND ALL THE SUBJECTS: ARITHMETIC, HE–BREW, SCIENCE — ALSO SCIENCE IS EASY. Still further on in the conversation, when he is requested to perform the boring task of relating a T.V. program, he brilliantly maneuvers the situation and transfers the task on to his friend: HEY! TELL HER A LITTLE BIT.

As for the practicing of various speech acts and strategies in conversation, such as hedging, qualifying, judging, justifying, exemplifying and generalizing -- it seems that both populations are equally capable of doing so, although such practice is much more prevalent in the speech of "privileged" children as the above excerpts show. This difference can be attributed to the nature of the registers used by the children. The more formal register which is more readily used by the privileged children in the interview situation is generally characterized by such modes of linguistic behavior; in the more informal intimate register, used by the disadvantaged children in these interviews, such modes of behavior are less essential. Thus, one finds that they are practiced only when their absence would violate a converstional maxim. For example, when one of the Dimonah boys, having stated that he spoke Arabic at home, is asked in a surprised tone of voice: YES! YOU KNOW ARABIC?, he senses the special significance the interviewer attaches to his knowledge of that language, and backs out a little, with the hedge: ARABIC? YES, A LITTLE., in order to guarantee the validity of his statement. Later on, when he lists the clubs he wants to attend, he realizes that he is on shaky grounds and supports his rather ambitious statement that he wants to attend the prestigious science club, by adding: ALSO SCIENCE IS EASY, thus implying that he is capable of meeting the standards of the club -- evidence that he is sincere about his plans, and that he is not violating the maxim of quality.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper parallel excerpts from two interviews, one with disadvantaged eleven-twelve year olds, the other with privileged ones, were carefully examined in terms of some of the pragmatic implicational and inferential strategies of conversation that were used. The

examination showed that although the two sets of children were using the same types of communicative strategies of inference to interpret the intent of what was being said, the conclusions they reached with regards to what was demanded or said, and their judgements as to what the reply should be in order to be appropriately cooperative differed. These differences could be attributed to extra-linguistic factors such as differences in the background knowledge of the children, in their assessment of the intents and backgrounds of their interlocutors, and in the relative importance they attach to the various cooperative principles of conversation, which, no doubt, are dependent on one's culture and system of values, as well as on social norms and norms of the register used. In this case the disadvantaged children, generally of Oriental (Asian and North African) origin, have a different cultural background and system of values from those of the Western-bred populations, dominating the privileged classes of the Israeli society, in general, and its educational institutions, in particular. Also, the general findings of these excerpts were observed in the analysis of the tape recordings of all the interviews in the Davis study, so that, the interviews presented in this paper can be said to be representative of the linguistic behavioral patterns observed in an arbitrarily selected sample of children from both populations.

It is suggested that the more the background the hearer shares with the speaker, the greater his abilities for guessing his intended speech acts and the implications of his various utterances and for making "correct" judgements as to what would constitute appropriately cooperative replies. Thus, middle-class privileged children will understandably do better in this "guessing" task in the school environment than the lower-class disadvantaged children, who generally do not share ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds with their educators. The different-cooperative-patterns factor, in addition to middle-class educators' bias towards formal registers, may serve to explain why the disadvantaged child is labeled as linguistically and mentally inferior. The latter factor accounting for the "deficiency" can be overcome by changing the social norms currently favoring the formal register in the school context. But until such a drastic change can come about, the second factor can be dealt with first, by making the educators aware

that differences in backgrounds can result in differences in the interpretations of utterances and asking them to accept such differences. A longer-term goal should involve some attempt to "bridge" the social, cultural, economic, educational and other gaps that exist between the populations involved by enriching their knowledge about each other's ways. This will serve as a step towards establishing the common or shared background necessary for successfully carrying out the "guessing" tasks that are essential to adequate interpersonal communication. Such familiarity will, no doubt, also help to "loosen" up any social and psychological inhibitions the disadvantaged children may feel towards using the formal register associated with the more privileged, educated, Western-bred middle-classes, when the situation calls for it, and thus increase the acceptability of their linguistic behavior in the eyes of middle-class educators.

This preliminary study into the pragmatic strategies of conversation used by populations from different backgrounds clearly demonstrates that further research in this direction can lead to deeper insights into the factors that make the linguistic behavior of disadvantaged populations appear so "different". Such research has universal implications, for, no doubt, differences of this kind exist in languages and social contexts other than those described in this paper.

FOOTNOTES

1 I am grateful to Lawrence Davis not only for kindly offering me his recordings of interviews with 11–12 year old children from a variety of socio-economic classes in Israel for analysis, but also for many hours of thought-provoking and insightful discussions on the subjects of non-standard spoken Hebrew and "social deprivation" of Israeli school children. The analyses and conclusions presented in this paper, however, are my own, and consequently, any shortcomings are my responsibility.

2 Ideally, these latter factors should be identical to those used for identifying disadvantaged children; any operational socio-economic

criterion used for determining whether a child is disadvantaged or not is insightful only to the extent in which it could be linked with the psychological processes by which environmental experiences influence child development and behavior.

3 It should be noted that this is a rather simplistic representation of the views and positions expressed in the literature about nonstandard language and deprived children, and that the actual views cover a range between those described here. The exact positions, however, are not essential to the central theses of the present study.

4 One must note that Davis does not claim that there emerge from the speech of the sample of children he examined two distinct monolithic registers, but that the various speech patterns can be grouped into two general types that seem to represent a formal register and an intimate one.

5 Blum-Kolka (1981), for example, has noted that in a situation where it is clear that a person's approval or permission is being implicitly sought, his reply YOU CAN GO, SIT, ETC. (in Hebrew or English) besides its literal meaning, expressing the ability of the addressee to carry out a certain act, is generally interpreted as granting permission or, at least, implying some measure of approval on the part of the speaker, both in a Hebrew-speaking society and in an English-speaking culture, while its equivalent in Greek is interpreted to express disapproval and hence, as a refusal to grant permission. In the latter culture, the equivalent of the stronger YOU SHOULD GO which literally expresses obligation on the part of the addressee to carry out a certain act is used to imply approval or the granting of permission.

6 Grice admits that the characterization of this maxim is problematic, given the facts that there can exist a number of foci of relevance in a talk exchange and that one must allow for shifts of focus as well as shifts of topics of conversation.

7 A yet different type of implicature described by Grice is what

he calls "generalized" conversational implicatures, which are amenable to invariant interpretations in the absence of special circumstances. Thus, regardless of particular context and previous speaker/hearer experience, for example, an utterance like PHILIP IS MEETING A WOMAN THIS EVENING implicates that the woman is someone other than Philip's wife, mother, sister, or daughter.

8 For an example of entailment, consider the statement I WANT TO GO HOME. Regardless of the particular context of utterance, it is clear that the speaker is not at home at the time of utterance. This information is entailed by the utterance and is not arrived at by probabilistic estimates of the type described for conversational implicatures.

9 The original interviews were, of course, conducted in Hebrew, and have been translated into English for the purposes of this paper.

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